BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5454 JANUARY 19, 1978
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

WHO GETS THE COW AND THE CALF?

ANNCR:

A LEGAL BATTLE IS SHAPING UP BETWEEN OPPOSING FACTIONS IN INDIA'S OPPOSITION CONGRESS PARTY OVER THE RIGHT TO USE THE PARTY'S SYMBOL, THE COW AND THE CALF. THE ISSUES ARE MORE THAN SYMBOLIC, AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN:

VOICE:

THE BATTLE LINES WERE DRAWN UP IMMEDIATELY AFTER SUPPORTERS OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI, AT A CONVENTION IN NEW DELHI EARLY IN JANUARY, BROKE WITH THE PARTY'S ELECTED LEADERS AND VOTED TO SET UP A NEW CONGRESS PARTY WITH MISSUS GANDHI AS THEIR LEADER. SHE HAD CHARGED THAT THE REGULAR PARTY LEADERSHIP HAD BECOME INEFFECTIVE AND THAT THE PARTY WAS INCAPABLE OF FULFILLING ITS ROLE AS THE OPPOSITION. THE REGULAR LEADERSHIP, IN TURN, ACCUSED MISSUS GANDHI AND HER SUPPORTERS OF ADOPTING A POLICY OF "RULE AND RUIN" AND EXPELLED THEM FROM MEMBERSHIP.

THE NEW CONGRESS PARTY, WHICH HAS COME TO BE KNOWN AS THE "CONGRESS OF INDIRA," CLAIMS TO BE THE REAL HEIR TO THE PARTY'S FOUNDERS, AND, AS SUCH, CLAIMS THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO USE THE PARTY SYMBOL. THE OTHER FACTION INSISTS THAT MISSUS GANDHI AND HER FOLLOWERS LOST THE RIGHT TO THE SYMBOL WHEN THEY WERE EXPELLED FROM THE PARTY. IN THE DAYS SINCE THE SPLIT WAS ANNOUNCED, BOTH SIDES HAVE BEEN BUSY CANVASSING FOR SUPPORT FROM LOCAL PARTY LEADERS AND THE RANK AND FILE.

WHILE THE REGULAR CONGRESS LEADERSHIP APPEARS TO BE LEADING IN THIS RACE, OBSERVERS SAY ITS STILL TOO EARLY TO SAY HOW THE FIGHT WILL COME OUT. IN THE MEANTIME, THE CONTEST OVER THE

PARTY'S SYMBOL HAS BEEN REFERRED TO THE NATIONAL ELECTION COMMISSION FOR A RULING. THE HEARING WAS TO HAVE STARTED MONDAY, BUT THE CASE WAS DELAYED UNTIL THURSDAY AT THE REQUEST OF MISSUS GANDHI'S SIDE.

THE COW AND THE CALF SYMBOL WAS ADOPTED BY THE CONGRESS PARTY IN 1969, AT THE TIME OF THE LAST PARTY SPLIT. AT THAT TIME, THE OLD CONGRESS FACTION, HEADED BY THEN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MORARJI DESAI, SUCCESSFULLY HELD ON TO THE OLD PARTY SYMBOL, TWO BULLOCK CARTS. SO MISSUS GANDHI'S FACTION, AT THAT TIME, CAME UP WITH A COW AND A CALF SYMBOL. THIS REFLECTS THE REVERENCE GIVEN TO THE COW IN INDIA AS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL SUBSTAINING FORCES IN LIFE, SUPPLYING MILK, FERTILIZER, AND EVEN HEAT IN THE FORM OF DRIED COW DUNG FUEL.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUCH SYMBOLS IN INDIAN ELECTIONS IS GREATLY MAGNIFIED BY THE FACT THAT OVER FORTY FOUR PERCENT OF THE VOTERS ARE ILLITERATE. SUCH VOTERS MAKE THEIR CHOICE ON THE BASIS OF THE PARTY SYMBOL, AND OF COURSE THE BETTER KNOWN THE PARTY SYMBOL, THE BETTER THE PARTY'S CHANCES AT THE POLLS. THE ELECTION COMMISSION COULD RESOLVE THE DISPUTE IN SEVERAL WAYS. IT COULD ASSIGN THE COW AND THE CALF TO MISSUS GANDHI. IT COULD GIVE IT TO THE REGULAR CONGRESS PARTY. OR THE COMMISSION COULD DECIDE TO ELIMINATE THE SYMBOL -- AND MAKE BOTH SIDES CHOOSE NEW EMBLEMS. BUT WHATEVER THE COMMISSION DECIDES, ONE WOULD HOPE IT WON'T BE THE POSSIBILITY BLATANTLY SUGGESTED BY A NEWSPAPER CARTOON HERE. THE CARTOON PICTURES A WORRIED LOOKING COW AND CALF AND IS CAPTIONED: WE HOPE THEY WON'T DECIDE TO SEPARATE US.

WJL/PBM